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Spy activity in Britain is reported

United Press International

LONDON — Britain's top-secret communications center has been infiltrated by spies for all but seven of the last 37 years, a left-wing British magazine reported yesterday.

The New Statesman said a Canadian, whom it identified as Leslie Bennett, was one of six people suspected of spying while working at the ultra-secret Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) at Cheltenham, in western England.

The headquarters is the center of Britain's intelligence communications network and the clearinghouse for all intelligence traffic across the Atlantic.

The article came one week after another employee, Geoffrey Prime, a Russian-language specialist at Cheltenham, appeared in court to face charges of spying for an unnamed country — presumably the Soviet Union — for 13 years, from 1968 to 1981.

"If the allegations against Geoffrey Prime... are true, then there have been only seven years in the last 37 when there has not been a Russian spy working at GCHQ," the magazine said.

"GCHQ might have effectively been 'turned around' to undermine Western security if the Russians have been able to use the activities of a well-placed agent to plant false or defective information," it said.

The magazine said Bennett worked for Canadian intelligence at Cheltenham and was accused by them of spying in 1972.

"He was subsequently medically discharged from the service and was later exonerated by Canada's attorney general," the magazine said.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declined to answer questions about Cheltenham security put to her earlier this week in the House of Commons.

The New Statesman article, written by Duncan Campbell, — who was acquitted of Official Secrets Act charges stemming from his investigation the workings of GCHQ for another magazine — described Bennett as "a former senior official, who worked at Cheltenham and at [British intelligence listening] bases in Cyprus, Hong Kong and Australia."

Bennett's case was quoted by the magazine as being one of five previous cases of alleged or proven spying by security staff connected with Cheltenham. The other four cases of alleged Cheltenham-linked spying outlined in the magazine involve:

- A British signals expert who defected to East Germany from Berlin in 1963.

- A Royal Air Force sergeant who fed back British intelligence reports on the Soviet Air Force to his Soviet paymasters between 1962 and 1968.

- A Chinese employee at the listening station in Hong Kong who passed secrets to Peking in 1961.

- Two Taiwanese specialists who defected to China in 1973 with armfuls of top-secret documents from the Hong Kong listening station.